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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3777  
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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0960  
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SUBJECT: JORDAN AND SYRIA SIGN 12 AGREEMENTS TO BOOST BILATERAL COOPERATION

REF: A) 07 Amman 4732  
B) 07 Amman 4678  
C) 07 Amman 3755  
D) 07 Amman 668

¶1. (U) Jordan and Syria signed 12 agreements designed to strengthen bilateral relations following up on the 12th session of the Joint Jordanian-Syrian Higher Committee which concluded December 31. The agreements address economic integration, trade, agriculture, water, health, industry, transportation, services and labor issues, sports, culture, youth, and the media. Jordanian Prime Minister Nader al-Dahabi and his Syrian counterpart Mohammad Naji Utri lauded the agreements and emphasized that each country would strive for immediate implementation. To that end, they agreed to establish a joint businessmen's council between their respective Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and proposed timetables for some activities: cooperation in housing and construction in 2008 and 2009; work on a cultural and scientific cooperation agreement for the period 2008-2010; conclusion of an agreement on social affairs, labor regulation, and vocational training by 2009; and an agreement on sanitation and drinking water for 2008-2009.

¶2. (SBU) Previous meetings of the bilateral joint committee have produced agreements as well as other initiatives addressing trade and water-sharing. Those compacts, however, have been largely symbolic and promised Syrian wheat has not materialized, in part due to a poor growing season and also to Syria overextending itself in terms of wheat export commitments (ref C). Likewise, Syria has not met its commitments to contribute to filling the Al-Wahdah (Unity) Dam. During talks the week of January 14 between USAID and the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA), the JVA Secretary General lamented that the Yarmouk River flow from Syria into the Wahdah dam continues to decline. Over the past year since the dam first became operational, only approximately 10% of its 110 million cubic meter capacity has been achieved. Water Minister Raed Abu Soud sounded cautiously optimistic over what he characterizes as an improved climate for cooperation, however, noting to USAID that Syria also has many competing demands on water resources and that his ministry will carefully monitor the amount of water flowing from the north in coming months.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite concerns about water, the results of this latest round of bilateral Syrian-Jordanian talks appear to be more substantive and more focused on Jordanian priorities than previous iterations, perhaps an outcome of recent, increased Jordanian interaction with Syria. Skeptics, however, say success can only be measured when Syria and Jordan streamline border crossing procedures between the two countries, about which talks are underway. END COMMENT.

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